



HIDE AND SNEAK





Hide
and Sneak



The outrageous pink-clad singer twirled in the spotlights on the front of the stage, before raising her hand mike to her face and singing the final word of the number . . . 'JEM'.





"Wow, I thought the fans would never stop clapping," said Jem, when she and her group – The Holograms – finally returned to their dressing room.

"Hey, someone's left a note asking to see Jerrica Benton out by the box office," said Kimber. "It doesn't say who it's from."

"Well, I guess Jerrica best go see what's happening," sighed Jem.

She shook her flowing pink hair to reveal her pointed, red earrings.

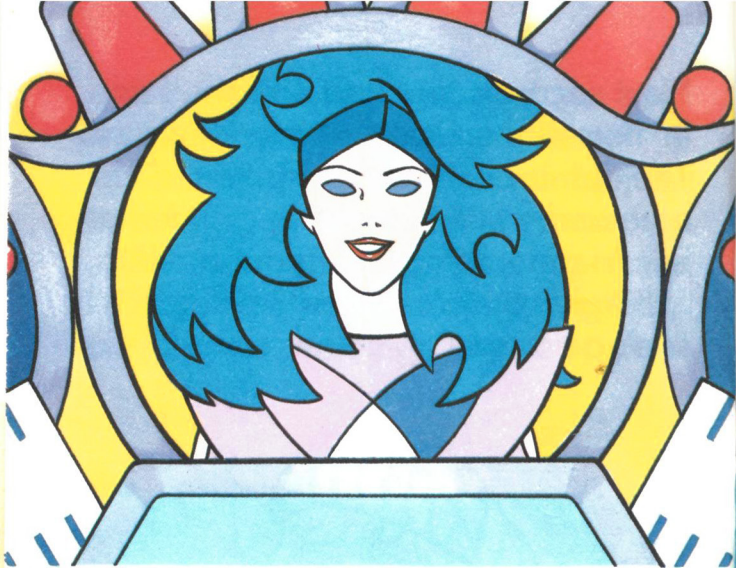
"Show time's over, Synergy. Turn the hologram off," said the pop star, touching her earrings as she spoke.



Next second, Jem had vanished and in her place stood Jerrica Benton. The demure blonde straightened her blue and white dress then grinned at her friends, Kimber, Shana and Aja.

"Right, girls," smiled Jerrica. "I'll see you later."

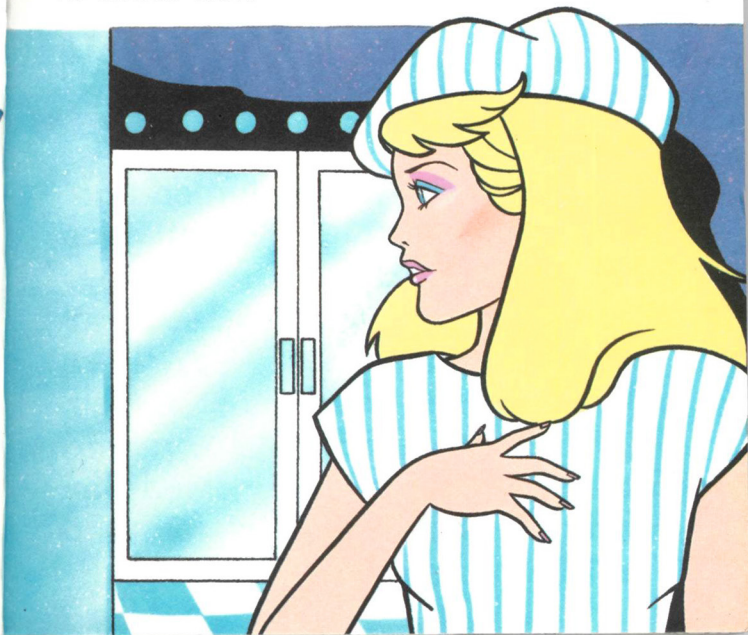


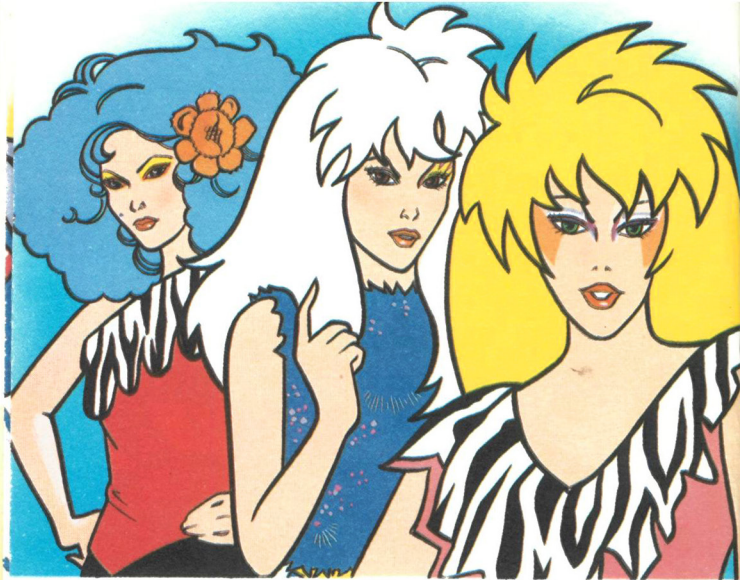


The change in appearance was brought about by Synergy, an amazing holographic computer. Jerrica's earrings were in fact micro-projectors that linked her to Synergy, and allowed her to call for any hologram, including the one that altered her own appearance into that of Jem, the fabulous fun-loving pop star!

Minutes ago, the area around the box office had thronged with happy, excited people making their way home after Jem's concert. Now it was empty and the lights were dimmed.

It seemed unnaturally quiet and almost eerie to Jerrica as she looked round for the person who had asked to meet her.





"Well, well. The wimp's turned up!" came a sneering, unpleasant voice from out of the shadows.

Jerrica turned round to see that coming towards her were three figures that she knew only too well. There was Pizzazz, Roxy and Stormer, the girls who formed The Misfits, the bitter rivals of Jem and The Holograms.

The Misfits were the last people Jerrica wanted to see.

She owned a share of Starlight Music, the company founded by her late father, and had formed Jem and The Holograms to stop the selfish schemes of Eric Raymond, who was desperately trying to promote The Misfits in his bid to take total control of Starlight.



"Oh, it's only you," said Jerrica to The Misfits. "What do you want?"

"No need to sound so cross. We only want a friendly chat," purred Pizzazz, making a feeble attempt at a smile.

"That's right," responded Roxy. "We think it's time to stop working against each other."

"So here we are to make you an offer," simpered Stormer.



"What sort of offer?" demanded Jerrica.

"Leave Jem and her band of no-hopers," said Roxy.

"Instead of running round after them you can come on stage with us!" added Pizzazz.

"We want you to join The Misfits!" concluded Stormer.



Jerrica didn't answer. She simply burst out laughing.

"What's so funny?" demanded Stormer.

"I'd never join you shower," chortled Jerrica.

The mood of The Misfits changed at once. They became their normal loutish, unpleasant selves.

"Right, you crumb," said Pizzazz, pointing a finger at Jerrica. "You've had your chance."



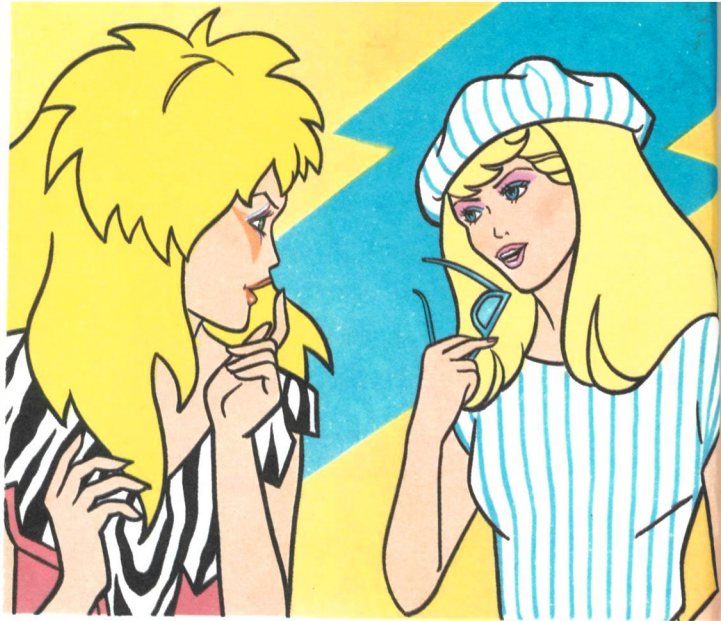
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"Having a sap like you join us would have been a real bore," snarled Pizzazz, "but it would've meant you couldn't keep looking after Jem, and we'd be left as Starlight's top group."

"But we're gonna be top group, anyway," said Stormer. "With you or without you."



Next evening, both The Holograms and The Misfits attended an exclusive nightclub for a presentation ceremony of rock and pop awards.

"Come to see us get our awards?" gloated Pizzazz to Jerrica.

"I didn't realise there was a category for the worst band of the year," returned Jerrica, coldly.

The club had its own impressive system of holographic lighting. It had the strange effect of making Jerrica's earrings glow, so that they were noticeable despite being hidden behind her long blonde hair.

She slipped the earrings off and put them on the table in front of her.





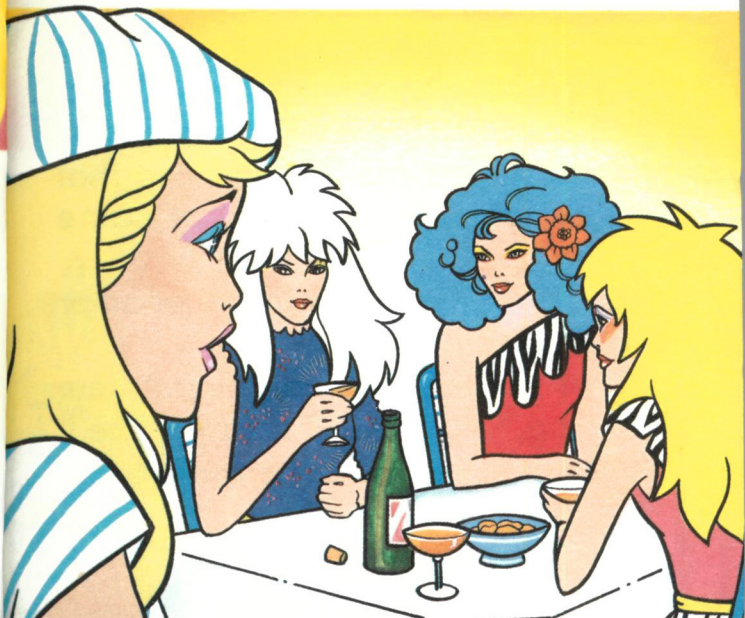
"I don't want people staring at me and realising I'm wearing Jem's earrings," she explained to The Holograms. "I'll stay as Jerrica for a bit longer before Jem makes her appearance."

After seeing some business friends Jerrica returned to her table.

The earrings were not there!

None of The Holograms had picked up the earrings, but they, too, had been chatting to friends and hadn't really been keeping guard over the table.

Jerrica looked across to a nearby table where The Misfits were sitting. They had horrible smug expressions on their faces.



Jerrica marched over to her rivals.

"Have you seen my earrings by any chance?" she demanded.

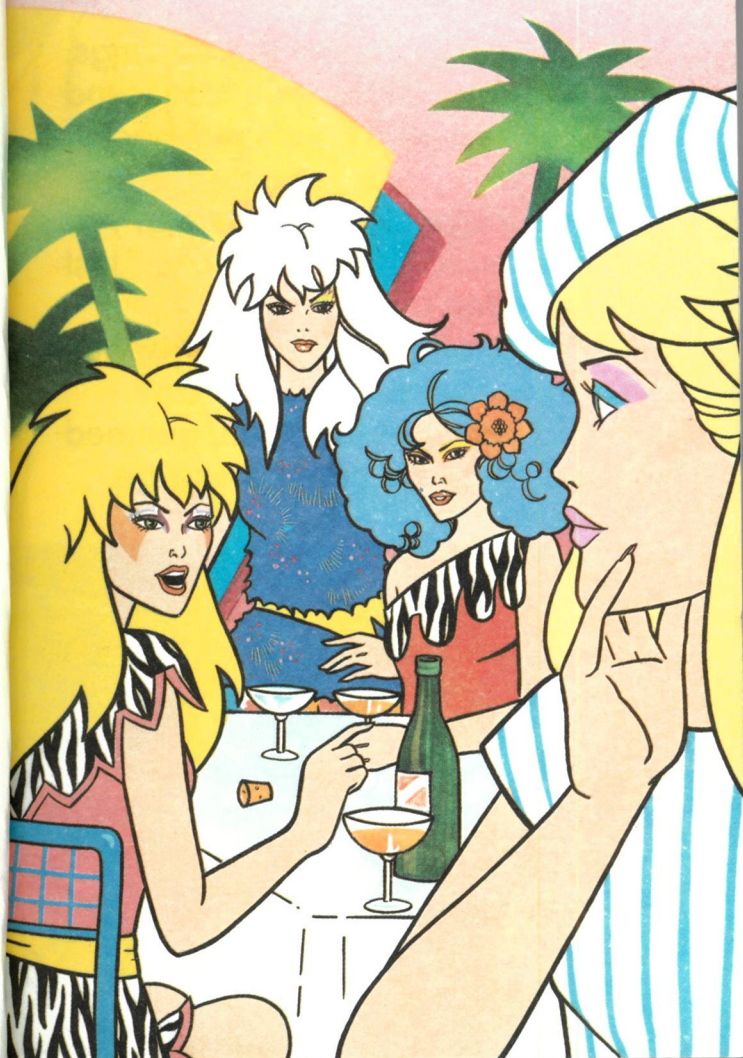
"We've seen the earrings that you were wearing," replied Roxy, "but we recognised them as the ones belonging to Jem."

"What were you doing with them?" asked Stormer.

"I . . . er . . . borrowed them," said Jerrica, lamely and without conviction. She was flustered and frightened lest there was the slightest chance of The Misfits guessing that Jerrica and Jem were the same person.

But The Misfits had hit on another explanation.

"Bet you took them without Jem knowing," mocked Pizzazz. "She'll be really sore when she finds out."



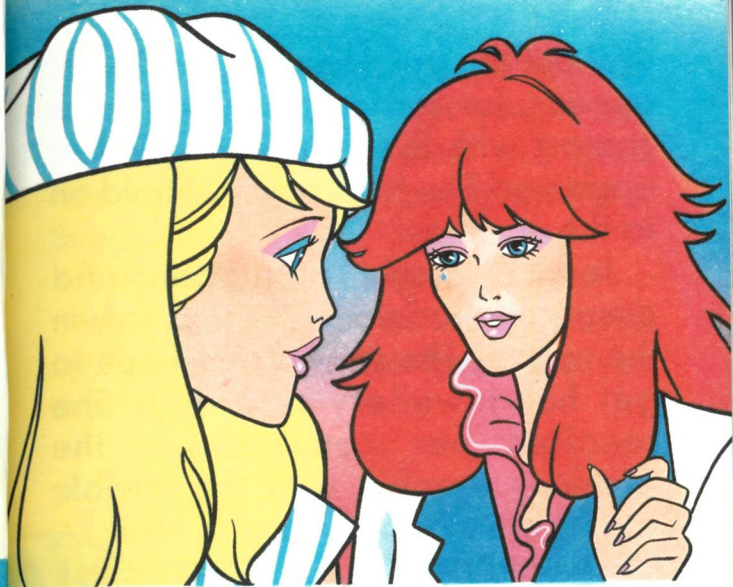
"So if you *did* borrow the earrings, Miss Goody-goody, you can send Jem to us and we'll hand them back," said Roxy.

"We'll make trouble between you and Jem," said Pizzazz, nastily. "Just see if we don't."

Jerrica stomped away. She was furious, but what could she do!

At that moment the lights dimmed and the compere came on stage.





Straight away he said, "Let's make the first award. Best new group is Jem and The Holograms."

"Jem can't make it," Jerrica hissed to The Holograms. "You girls 'll have to go."

As she heard Kimber make apologies for Jem's absence, Jerrica pondered on what to do.

Without the earrings Jem could not appear, for Jerrica could not make contact with Synergy. But until Jem appeared The Misfits would hold on to the earrings!

Jerrica made a sudden and desperate decision. She had to win the trust of The Misfits and hope to get her jewellery returned. She recalled her conversation the previous evening with the terrible trio. There was nothing else for it . . . she would have to join The Misfits!

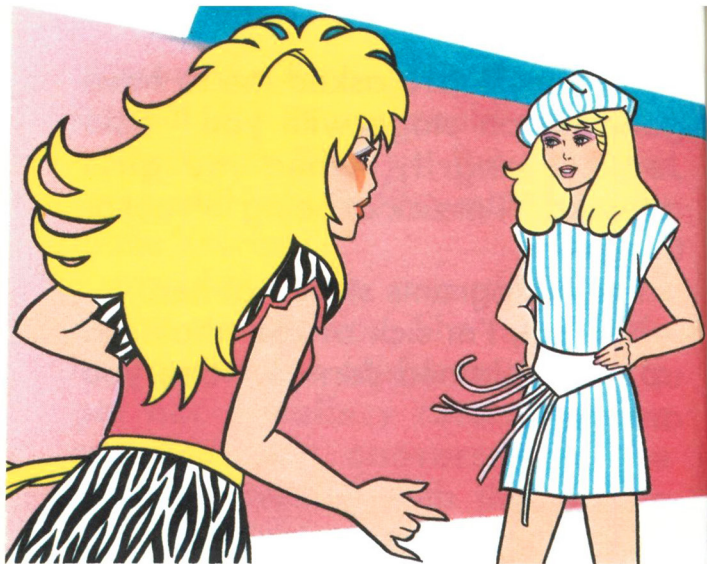


"You could have asked me to have gone up on stage with you," said Jerrica, angrily, when the girls returned. "I'm sick of being left out of things."

The Holograms stared at her.

"In fact, I'm sick of the whole set up," complained Jerrica. "See you around."





Jerrica stalked out of the room, aware that the eyes of The Misfits were turned on her. Had they been taken in by her show of temper? She had not gone far down the corridor when Pizzazz caught her up. "Remember our offer, Jerrica. It's still open."

"Okay, Pizzazz. You're on," said Jerrica. "I'll join The Misfits."

Rio could not believe his ears when he heard the news the next morning.

He was Jem's road manager and Jerrica's boyfriend, but even he did not know that the 'two' girls were the same person.

The Misfits had insisted that Jerrica told him of her decision.



"But why are you doing this?" Rio pleaded. "Why are you hurting The Holograms, Jem, Starlight Music . . . and me."

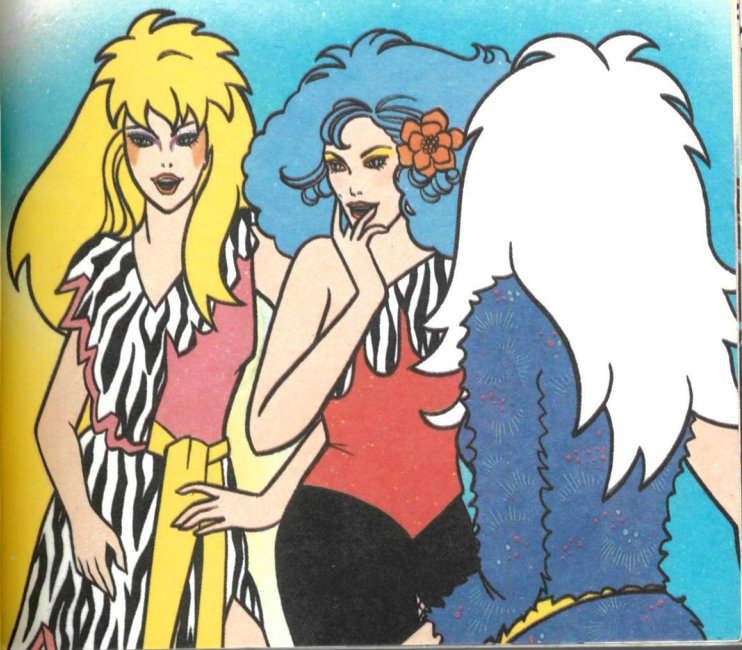
Jerrica raised her eyes from the floor and looked coldly at Rio.

"Starlight Music is no concern of yours," she said. "Jem's contract with this company came through *me*! Maybe you best think about finding another company for her."



Rio turned and left the room without speaking another word.

"Hey, you're really nasty," said Pizzazz. "I'm almost beginning to like you."



"Now that you're one of us you'll have to look like us," said Roxy. "We'll get you some real clothes instead of that wimp outfit."

Jerrica did not reply. It was all she could do not to cry after the painful scene with Rio.

"And I'll show you some proper make-up," said Pizzazz.



Jerrica wasn't sure if she would have recognised herself when The Misfits had finished. It was more dramatic than the change from Jerrica to Jem!





"Can you play a musical instrument, Jerrica?" asked Roxy.

"Er . . . no," admitted Jerrica.

"Then you'll fit in with us okay," laughed Pizzazz.

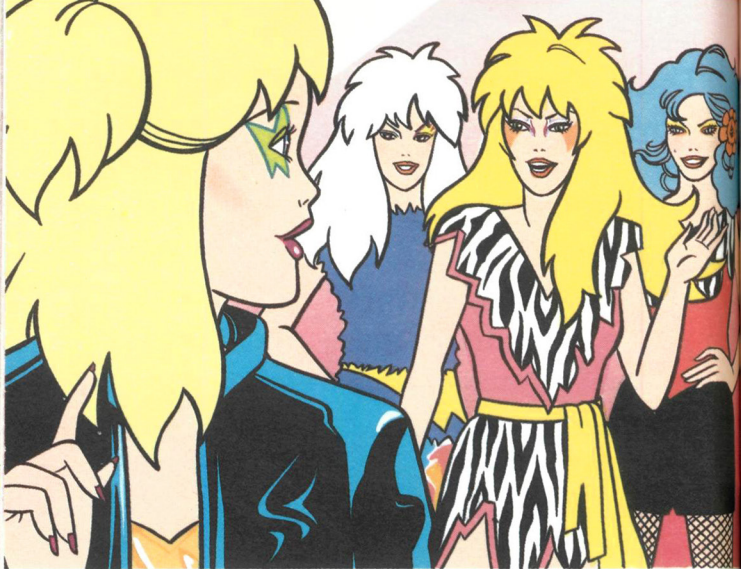
"You can come on stage at our concert tonight," said Stormer. "We'll make a big announcement and introduce you as the new member of The Misfits. Wonder what Jem'll think about it?"

That evening, Rio paced up and down The Holograms' dressing room. He kept glancing at his watch.

"First Jerrica goes off and now Jem just vanishes," he said. "What on earth's going on?"

The Holograms exchanged uneasy glances. There was just thirty minutes before their concert was due to start.





Time was running out for Jerrica as The Misfits were cackling away as they got ready to go on stage.

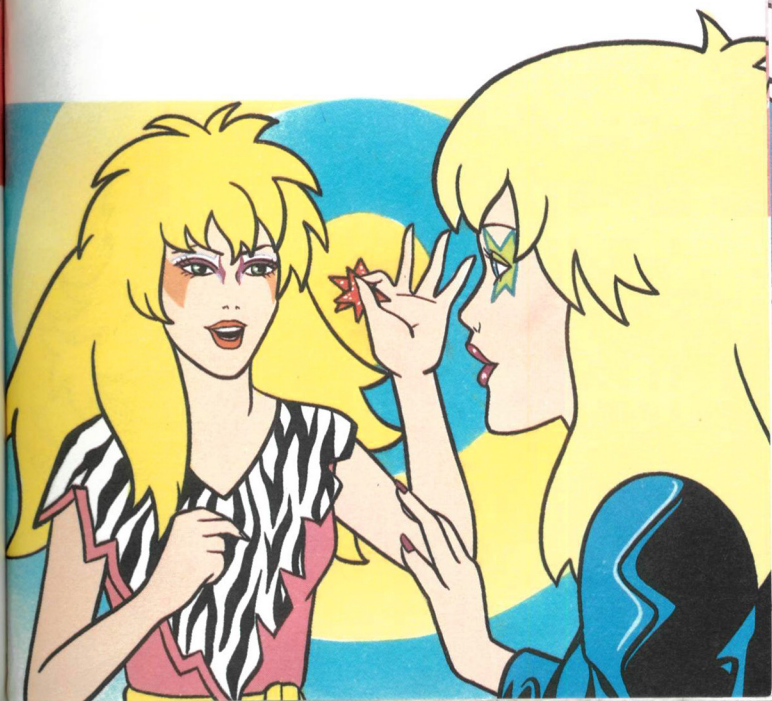
"I'd really like to rub salt in the wounds for Jem," said Jerrica. "Do something to show how much I hate her."

Pizzazz laughed, harshly and unpleasantly. "I know what you can do," she said.

"Why not wear her earrings?"

"Yeah," chuckled Roxy, "you've taken her place in Starlight's top rock band, you may as well take her jewellery, too."

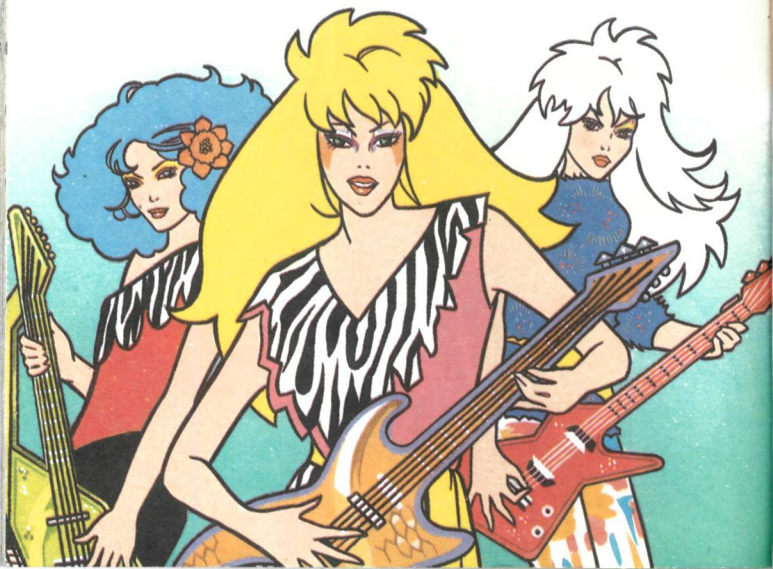
Jerrica needed no second invitation.



As soon as The Misfits slouched on stage, Jerrica touched the earrings.

"Hiya, Synergy," she whispered, "we're back in business. Get me into some decent gear, will you?"

After the first noisy, nauseous number, Pizzazz took centre stage, and said, "Now it's time to meet someone from Starlight with some big news to tell you."





Jem came bounding on to the stage, to the horrified and bewildered expressions of The Misfits. The outrageous pop star took the mike from a dazed Pizzazz and waved to the crowd.

"I'd like to announce the dates of my new tour with The Holograms," she said.

Back in The Holograms' dressing room, Rio was pacing up and down.

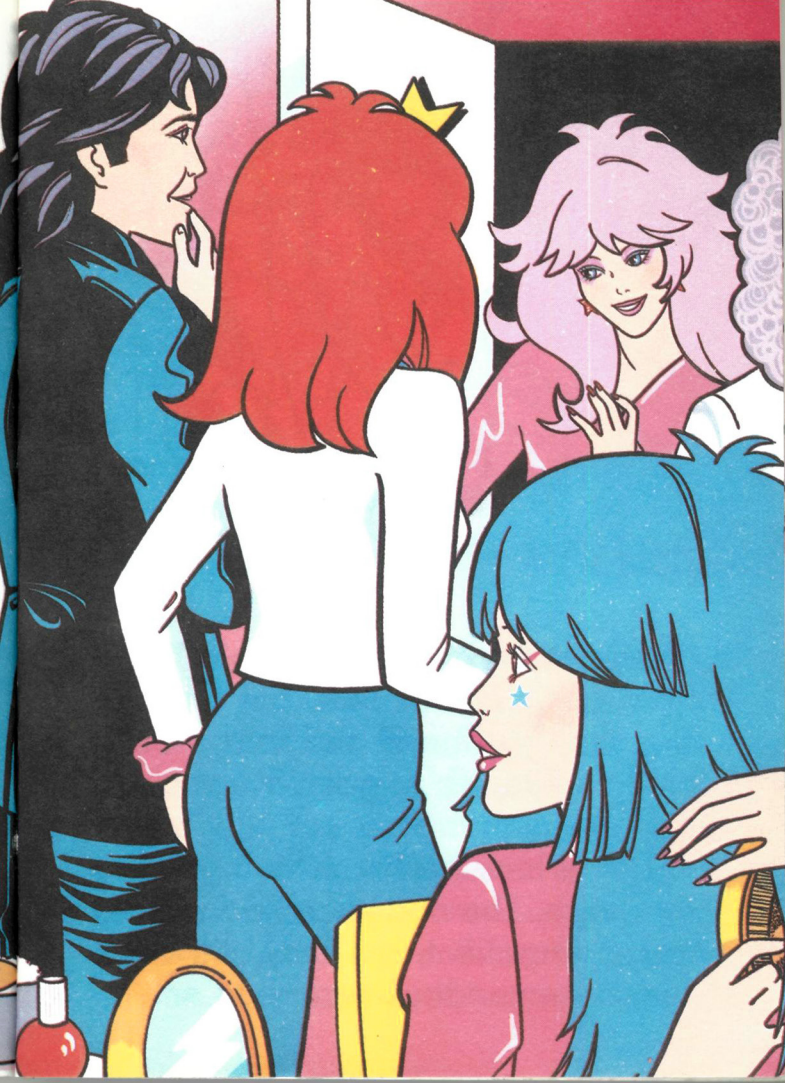
"You're on in thirty seconds, girls," said Rio to The Holograms. "There's no sign of Jem. You'll have to go on without her. Kimber, you take over the vocals."

"Kimber? Singing? You must be joking." The voice came from the breathless, laughing person who burst through the door into the dressing room.

"JEM!" yelled The Holograms in delight.

"Of course," said the pop star, looking surprised. "Who were you expecting, King Kong?"

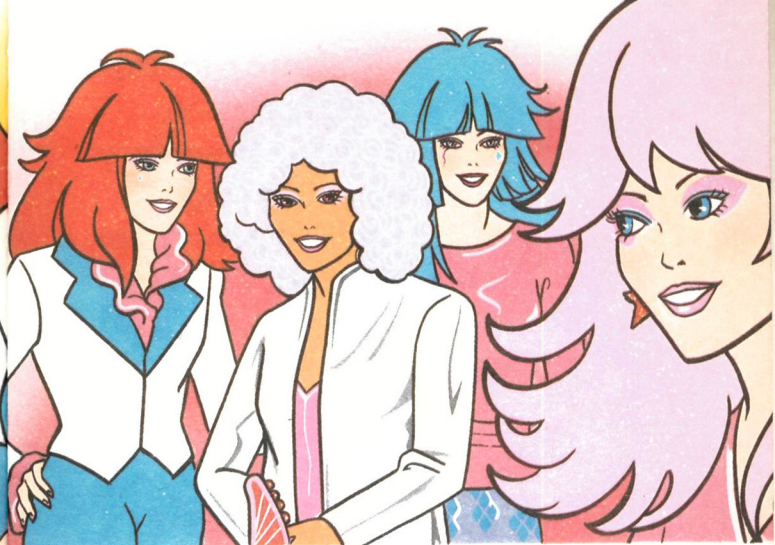






"How? Why? What? When?" Rio fired questions at Jem, but the pop star simply grinned and said, "Can't explain, Rio, we've got a live show to do."

The girls rushed from their room to the stage. The audience had started to get impatient, but they still gave Jem a tremendous reception.



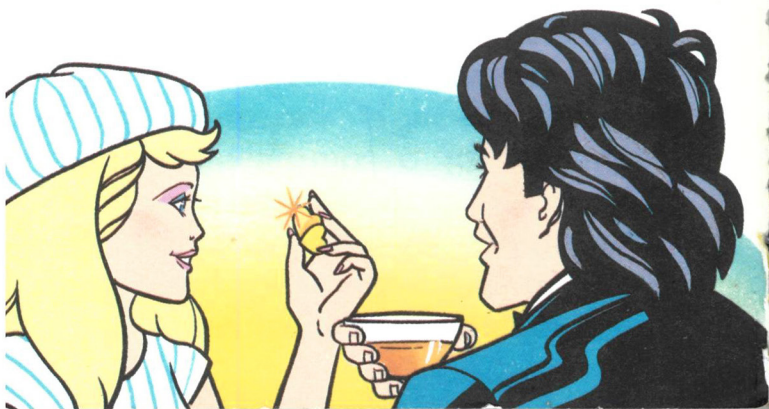
Jem told The Holograms the full story of how Jerrica had had to pretend to take sides with The Misfits.

Later that night, Rio and Jerrica went out for a romantic candlelit dinner. Jerrica didn't need to explain everything. As The Misfits were involved, Rio knew there had been some underhand plot at work.

"I bought you a great-to-be-together-again gift," smiled Rio.

He produced a small jewellery box. It contained some earrings.

"Earrings!" said Jerrica, trying not to laugh. "You know, Rio, I've been trying desperately to get hold of some earrings."





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